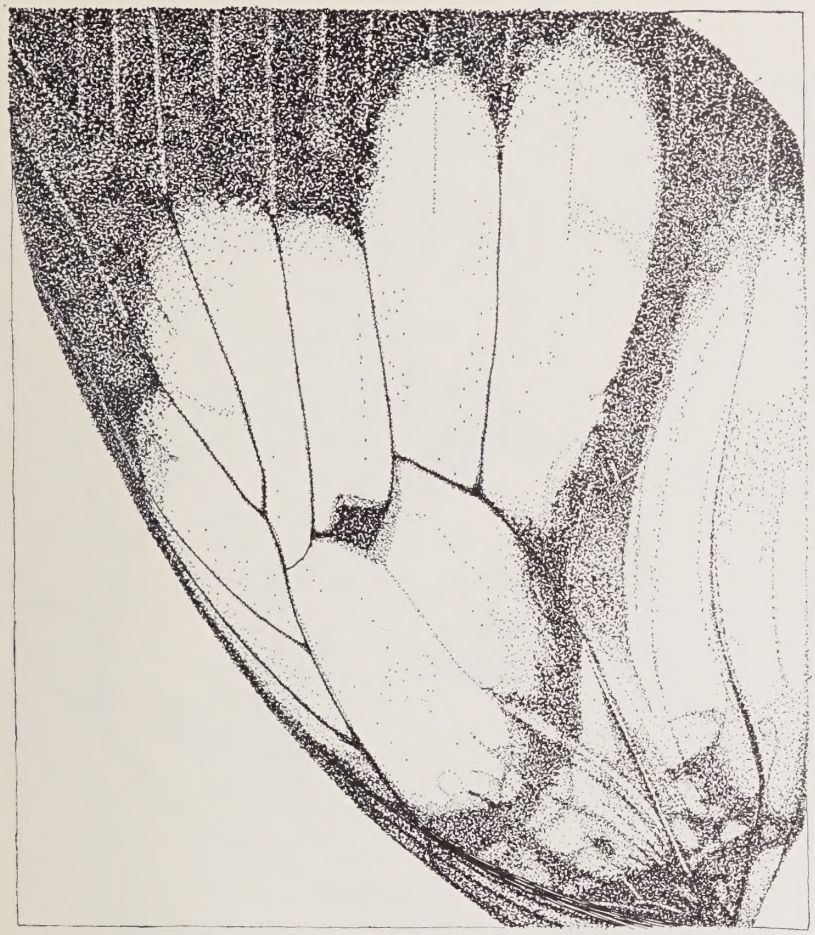

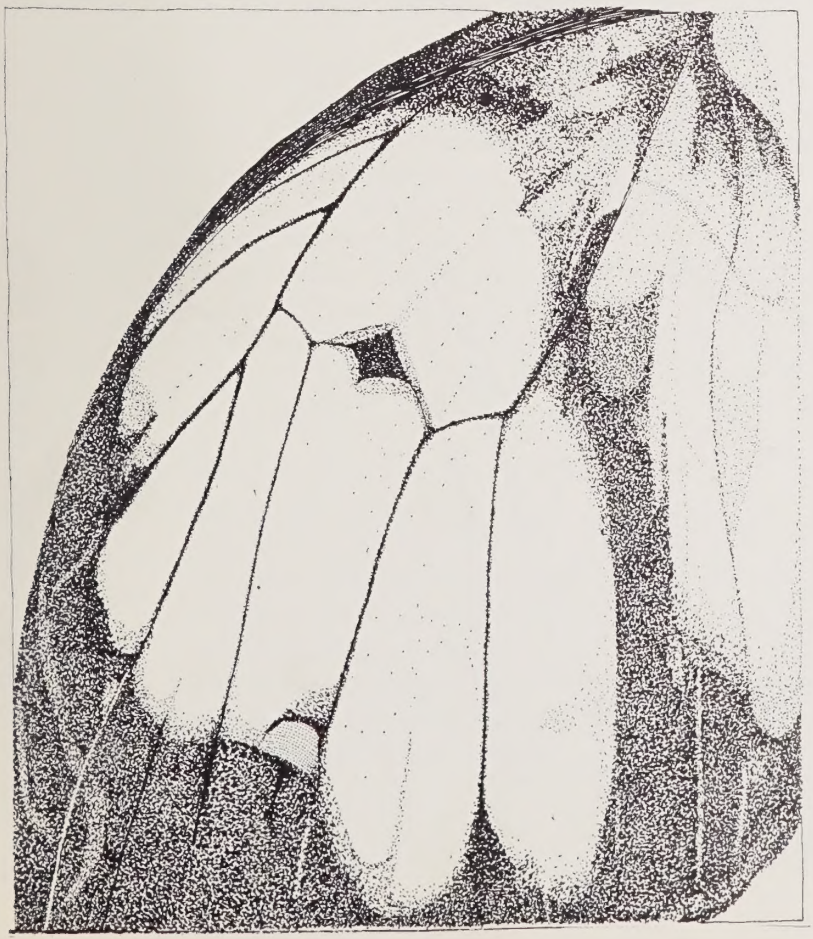

Signet SPRING 1969

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The Last Summer

by Leslie Anne Davis

By the beginning of summer Dog Days when the weeds are pollinating, small New Jersey lakes lie still in the morning like fresh sheets of paper waiting for the pen. Life seeps to the edges of the water before the heat of the day with the usual August sounds of screen doors and transistor radios.

At the Western end, a bony, thick-haired boy appeared at the top of the hill leading to the lake. After kicking the customary door closed he began the descent, building momentum as he jumped down the cement steps, zig-zagging level by level to the bottom. He disappeared into the garage from which he finally emerged carrying an old green oar twice his length. The boy, however, had no trouble maneuvering, as he walked with the absentminded dexterity that results from repetition. He continued across the road with his oar, walked the length of the sagging dock, removed his sneakers, and jumped into the punt moored at the end.

Turtling and the talent (patience) it takes passes through generations; it does not depend upon age, but on a feeling for what lives beneath the lily pads. If snakes are to be feared, the keenest eyes in the world are ineffective in that moment of hesitation before plunging an arm of whatever length into the weeds after a small head that will hopefully be followed by a hard shell.

Times have been better for the turtles. When the lake-weed grew thick and threatening, having temporarily won, the boy could crouch among his prizes in the shallow water without the annoyance of a boat. With the water line hitting his chin, he could make friends with whatever brushed against the fuzz of his thin legs anchored in the filmy clay-sand of the lake bottom.

Systematic spraying to kill the weeds has made the swimming better. The hay fever comes a little later, but the turtles have been forced into deeper water with the weeds.

Zachary returns to the lake every Spring to find the turtles new and the size of nickels. By August they are sunning on old boards hand-size and smarter after three months of dodging their old friend.

Now with rotting green oar Zach pushed the punt out and headed slowly for the one corner where the weeds thrived in victory over the civic association. He poled easily over the polyethylene floor beyond the dock, a primitive but successful control of the algae. After studying the mountains of plastic formed by the gasses underneath, he moved to a recently cleared area about five feet deep. When the punt was still, Zachary peered over the edge and studied the outline of a sunken rowboat. The boat, which had once been green, died a natural death. It was dragged out to its grave and unceremoniously sunk with rocks at the spot where it now lay spongy and brown.

After seasons on the bottom the boat began to take on new mystery which Zach discovered on his

solitary excursions to the turtle patch. Now he idly poked the bow with the oar half hoping to stir up a musk turtle, but also thinking of the possibility of putting it into dry dock and salvaging it for his own use.

This particular summer was filled with times like these when turtles must take a back seat. Consequently they had gotten little exercise, content to sun themselves until challenged. They grew August slow perpetuating the theory that spotting eyes get sharper as the summer progresses.

After the rowboat had been sufficiently poked, Zach returned to the stern and poled his way in the direction of the weeds. Sunken boats were not the only thing that drew his attention, it seemed anything would occupy his thoughts, keeping him from the concentration necessary to spot the tiny heads. Having reached turtle territory Zachary stilled the boat, but instead of studying the weeds, he sat down and leaned back against the seat to watch the sky.

In August Western Jersey skies are hot and empty with the exception of large black birds wandering on the currents which bring them out over the lake and back into the hills. In past years Zach and his brother had spotted turtles as a team, one poling and one grabbing for the shells. There *was* competition, however, for being the first to spot the kingfisher as it coasted among the buzzards making quiet circles until it suddenly swooped on an unsuspecting fish that had come too close to the surface. The kingfisher became the constant point of bets and bragging about keen eyesight.

This August Zachary was left to fill the vacation himself. His brother, caught in growth, was gone to job which replaced him with postcards of New York, and tales of Yankee Stadium, but no one to handle the oar for the "grabber." Even Yankee Stadium had let him down. The one person he depended on to fill the afternoons had retired; Cooperstown's Baseball Hall of Fame had, at last, claimed "the Mick." After seasons of announcing "This is my last" and playing surrounded by banners reading, "Cooperstown Will Have to Wait," Mickey Mantle stuck to his word and left the game for good. Therefore, by late August Zach was left with an empty boat, and a silent transistor radio as he kept the vigil alone.

As he watched them, the birds created a pattern as they floated out and back until, at last, one came into sight which dropped from the others as it headed for the water. With a whoop Zach sat up and called to the bird, "Hello you old Kingfisher, I knew you'd be back!"

With that he turned to the water and squinted as he studied the lily pads.

Negative

White shadows, black birches, tinted fog;
Winter is a wet negative hanging in a yellow darkroom.

sfr

Two Poems
by
Sherry McGeachy

Magenta

A little girl stood outside the door
And smiled at me.
I didn't smile back at her.
I think I was too busy eating
Spearmint lifesavers at the time.
I don't remember now.
Her dress was dirty and torn
And I didn't even smile back at her.

Why do you ignore me?
Have we grown up that much?
If growing older is like this,
I think I'll join Peter Pan.

Did you ever stop to think that somewhere in the world
Right this very minute
A boy has just seen his puppy hit by a car
And somewhere chickens are laying eggs
Bicycles are running through mud puddles and over rocks
And some lady somewhere is burning a hole in her carpet
With her cigarette while she decides what to bid in a
Bridge game.

Why did you laugh when I told you I saw Walter Mitty
Yesterday in his commodore's cap with his galoshes
Under his arm?
I didn't think it was very funny.
But you sat there and laughed and laughed
And laughed.

An ant crawled across my knee and I picked it up
And held it in my palm
And let it travel up my thumb.
But you saw it and with that insolent sneer of yours
You crushed it.

If you look at the ceiling long enough
It begins to stare back at you.
I wonder what color eyes the ceiling has when it
Stares at you.
I prefer to think they're magenta—
(Purple for passion)

Some night when it's dark and I'm lying awake
Staring at the ceiling,
I see two bright pools of purple light
And one of them winks at me
And I laugh and think of you.
Then I go to sleep filled with the satisfaction
That you're not capable of seeing
A ceiling that winks.
(You're far too wise beyond years, sayeth the Zen Koan)

Someone has just read about Robert Jordan
Breaking his leg and being trapped—
But blowing up the bridge anyway
Despite the fact that he'll go with the bridge.
Brave feats to enthrall the masses.
In the county hospital the old man pensively
Watches the top of his oxygen tent rise and fall
And I sit here and think about how you've changed.
My details are the most frivolous of all.

Dappled

I walk along the shallow, muddy stream
And watch the water crash over the bent
    fuzzy twigs and soft brown rocks.
The water bug finds safe harbor underneath
    the shadow of the goldenrod,
    bent heavy with pollen.
The current is swift;
And as it moves along, it snatches my mind
    and memory
And drowns them in a whirlpool of paper
    daisies and spongy hearts
And stuffs them into the orange crayfish's
    tunnel.

I look up through the trees and see one
cloud staring at me, like a clown's face
painted in white tempora with a tear
artificially etched on his cheekbone.

We've passed an eon of callowness together
And laughed and cried and learned and suffered.
Now that you're gone
    I stand behind the tree
And appreciate its lingering
    Semblance of you.

I sense the other minds wondering together
About the color of the wind, or the number
of sand grains in the ant hill.
But your mind is a thousand miles away
and not on the wind or the ants or
the crayfish tunnel
Or our time together.

The others talk of books, and places, and men.
And their talks lose significance in frivolity.
Their intimate whispered messages are
Weighted feathers dropping quickly into
The pillow of forgotten words.
    Our whispers are remembered.

Things are concave now.
Emotion is scraped out.
Memories surface and
Blemish an otherwise
Stoic calmness.
The past always clouds the
Future.
The future always uncovers the
Past.

The stream rushes madly beside me and
The water bug has become trapped in the current.
But he will come back, just as my mind and memory
Will again emerge from the orange crayfish's tunnel.

Dating Lingo

by Ann Scott Gray

The topic of my paper is the current "dating" lingo of college members of the female sex. I used as my "field" the third floor of Wallace Dorm at Queens College, which is comprised of seniors in college. However, the lingo showed some infiltration from boys' schools in and out of the area and this could not be helped. The "raw material" displayed a cross section of the United States, but the phrases used seem to have been acquired after the girls came to college. The language, I'm afraid, demonstrates the way our minds run which is both good and bad. The girls all belonged to a so-called "clique" in a broad sense of the term, that is third floor Wallace seems to be rather exclusive. The list was compiled in the lounge by the phones and the continual senior bridge game.

1. *white socks' kid*—a boy not even worth the free beer one gets when she's with him.
2. *teeny bopper*—better than a white socks' kid but worse than one of The Preams. He listens to a radio station such as Big Ways and wears his alpaca sweater tucked in.
3. *The Preams*—boys who are pseudo-psychedelic. Can be frequently found at The Purple Penguin.
4. *hunk*—a boy that is worth dating twice or three times, not much more. He's only to look at, the "pretty boy."
5. *groovola creamora*—this is the great date. He will understand this lingo and more important will have new and better "in" phrases. His looks don't matter, he's fun.
6. *up tight*—tense. The feeling before you know to which group, 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5, your blind date will belong.
7. *pleh*—help. Distress signal while on a date with a white socks' kid.
8. *blow lunch*—feeling you have, in varying degrees, after a date with a white socks' kid, a teeny bopper, or one of The Preams.
9. *a little slice of heaven*—feeling after a date with a groovola creamora.
10. *kick it*—to have a great time. If one is satisfied with her blind date, that is if he's a number 5 preferably but if necessary a number 4, and he with her, then she is asked to . . .
11. *big colley week-end*—one of the all out efforts of the boys' schools to kick it.
12. *catch some rays*—taking a sun bath. This is done in the spring before a big colley week-end. "So we'll look our best."
13. *road trip*—what one must take to get to a big colley week-end.
14. *scope ya now, catch ya later*—the farewell as you are leaving on a road trip to those left behind. It means "see you around."
15. *sipping suds*—drinking beer. This is done on a big colley week-end when you arrive on Friday afternoon and before you leave on Sunday afternoon.
16. *juke time*—denotes a party, often fraternity, when you put up the beer and bring out the bottle.
17. *mystery goo*—found on the floor of fraternity houses at big colley week-ends. No one dares analyze it.

18. *craved it*—successful week-end date, the typical good-bye to your date.

After kicking it for the week-end one must return to Queens and meet with . . .

19. *book it*—to casually study, as to skim an assignment for tomorrow's class.

20. *go to the brary and book it*—to work on a research paper.

21. *glue my baby blues on print city*—to study for a test under the pressure of very limited time.

22. *panic city*—a test for which the limited amount of time to study has run out.

If the week-end was really a success we hear after the pressure of a panic city has been removed . . .

23. *I luv him*—means snowed, infatuated. Hints at more big colley week-ends with him.

24. *I'm in love*—means "I'll take the ring." This is the ultimate of conditions for most of third floor Wallace.

If one gets hooked on one of these big colley week-ends she may, God forbid, meet with . . .

25. *dropped*—given your walking papers from a boy whom you've dated for some time.

26. *brown helmet*—what you are said to wear when the boy you've been dating for some time fails to give you your walking papers, he just never calls back. This is the epitome of embarrassment.

And then she ends, as most of us do, back on third floor Wallace with . . .

27. *groovy flick*—great movie in Charlotte. This applies to movies with censorship ratings of M or X.

28. *catch it on the tube*—"call" when something good is on television, usually "Laugh-In."

29. *slide to the greasy spoon*—go to dinner at the Fish Camp.

or best of all

30. *rack monster's got me*—overpowering urge of the escape mechanism "sleep."

Personal Peace

Walking along the oceans' edges,
  where the sand doesn't bother to speak
French or Spanish or English.
  (only peace)

In the morning that hasn't quite come
  to the rest of the world yet,
  (only to you)

When the clouds still blanket the tide
  that blankets the sand.

Without fear of laughter you say
  what's really on your mind.
(with only the waves as the applauding audience,
breaking occasionally into a thundering ovation)

MARY ANN HESTER

Not Yet

I've moved from Nigger to Nigra to Negroe (sometimes colored, I never
could tell)
To Black—I know, you want me to say "Black" and think "Man"—
But your friend Tom stuffs cotton down my throat with one hand
While he scrapes my shoes with the other and my words are muffled

and

Bedford Forrest, Cotton Ed Smith and Bilbo got a combo going
(Alto sax courtesy of Eli Whitney) playing the uncomposed music
Of Lee arranged contemporary by the squinting eye of Stennis and the
Octogenarian ambitions of Thurmond (Stonewall Jackson beats time
On his knee with his Confession of Faith),

and

I smell Watts smoke and Detroit smoke and Washington smoke
And Rap Brown's got a pair of long handled fireplace matches
In his hand and Ché Guevara's monogrammed shirt on his shoulders

and

You destroyed Color television sets that cost 495 and 595
And adjust themselves even without touching or thinking or anything—
But never will again,

and

My daughters are lacquered fair, (full of Sea and Ski options
That you don't know about) and they play old Monkey records,
Salute suburban history and have split level toilets that always
Work (and if they don't we've got a spare).

and anyhow

I can't come tonight cause the choir meets, and in the morning there's a
Prayer breakfast, and Rotary's at noon, and Little League
Signs up after, and even *you* know the Session meets on Wednesdays.

J. DANIEL ZELUFF

Life On Little River

Kathy Fetter

Old Leola Bullock was lively for her years. Nobody knew exactly how old she was or where she came from, but she had been living in that old house long enough to have raised my cousins and me from the crib. Her two-story box-frame house sat on the edge of the drop like a shoebox set on end. Weather-beaten boards showed under the curling white paint, looking as if all they wanted to do in their old age was blend into the forest of Virginia pines that flanked the house. The house faced the river, and the water lapped stubbornly at the tangle of driftwood lying at the foot of the hollowed-out bank. A gravelly dirt path led diagonally down from the cinderblock steps to a short wharf paved with loose oyster shells; the only way to get to the house was by an old wagon road leading back through the woods to a highway.

My cousins and I used to borrow Uncle Prosser's four horsepower motorboat and ride over to Leola's all the time. She worked for both our families, and since Fleeton's Point was just downriver from us, we'd take turns running down there and picking her up in the mornings and taking her back in the afternoons. Usually we stayed there until dusk, helping her chop wood, weed the garden, put up the chickens, or mow the mangey lawn with her rusty, wheezing old mower.

When we had finished the chores, she would disappear into the house for a few seconds, then reappear with a bushel basket of butterbeans or corn, the screen door banging shut behind her; and we'd all sit around the front steps and shell butterbeans or husk corn until the late afternoon sunlight sparkled on the water like pink and gold and orange sequins. Or if it was too cold to sit outside, we would troop into Leola's kitchen with its warped linoleum floor and she would hand out fresh-baked cookies. Then we'd sit back in creaking wicker chairs around the big iron stove that had warmed three generations of Virginia negroes but warmed us just as well, and Leola would tell us stories.

Old Leola was a storyteller from way back. She came out with some of the greatest stories . . . one time she was telling us about when her granddaddy went out west with a wagon-train led by Daniel Boone and his huge blue ox named Baby. Well, she got me really interested, so I checked out a book of American legends at school and much to my dismay found that Paul Bunyan was the one with the blue ox. The next time Leola wound up for the wagon-train story, I mentioned it to her. She looked at me for a second, then her eyes crinkled at the corners and with a smug smile

she explained that yes, Paul Bunyan did have a blue ox named Babe, and his horns really were seventeen ax-handles from tip to tip. But Daniel Boone had had a blue ox too, only his name was Baby, because his horns were only fifteen ax-handles. I never was quite satisfied with that explanation, but obviously she thought it solved the whole problem, so I didn't say anything else about it.

One day when I came home from school I heard my mother and Leola talking, which was a pretty common thing for them to be doing, but this time it bothered me because they sounded serious. Leola finally said in an I'm-putting-my-foot-down tone of voice, "It's MY land and I ain't goin' to sell it to no half-baked real estate agent; I done told him that a thousand times already and I ain't fixin' to tell him NO more . . ."

I asked Leola about it when I took her home that afternoon, but she didn't much want to talk. She just sat in the boat and faced straight ahead until the boat bumped gently against her dock, then she looked up at the old white house standing up there in the middle of the tall trees and dirty chickens, and the sight of it seemed to perk her up. She grinned and her eyes crinkled as I helped her out of the boat. When she asked was I going to stay this afternoon, I said no I had to be getting home, but I'd stay tomorrow. So she nodded, still smiling, and as I pulled away from the wharf, I heard her crunching through the oyster shells toward the dirt walk.

That night my mother explained. It had to do with Mr. Shackelford, a local real estate dealer who owned all the undeveloped waterfront property for about a mile on either side of Leola. It seemed that he had had this big businessman down from Richmond a while ago, and had gotten to bragging about his property. Well, the man said that he would like to see it, because his wife had been giving him fits about a summer cottage down near the bay; so Mr. Shackelford took him out in his boat and rode him up and down the river, pointing out the glowing virtues of his lots, and after a while, he got a little carried away and told his guest to pick one, any one, of the lots, and he would give it to him as a present if he would go back to Richmond and talk up Mr. Shackelford's Little River property to his associates. Overwhelmed by this generosity, the executive promptly picked Fleeton's Point and said that he would bring his wife down to see it in two weeks. Poor chicken-hearted Shackelford suddenly realized what a pickle he had gotten himself into. That was last week; Mr. Shackelford didn't have too much more time, and he was in a real fever. He had called Leola every night until she finally began leaving the phone off the hook; then he had started coming over, making all kinds of offers running up to huge sums, but Leola just didn't want to move—she wanted to live the rest of her days quietly in the house she loved, watching the water shimmer at sundown.

My mother sighed. She just didn't know what Mr. Shackelford was going to do, but after all it was his own fault and she sure wished he'd get off Leola's back about it.

That night I lay in my bed and looked out the window at the stars hanging in the clear sky and listened to the boats thumping gently against the wharf and I thought of Leola. I just couldn't see her living anywhere except in that weatherbeaten house with the cinderblock steps. I was glad she wasn't going to move.

The next thing I remember is waking up to the throbbing howl of the volunteer fire alarm. I jumped out of bed and ran to the window—my father was already dressed and running down to the wharf with his ax. Not one to miss out on anything, I jerked open my door and bolted out behind him. I got down to the water just as Uncle Prosser and a boatload of men pulled up to the end of the dock to pick up Dad. One of them said in a loud voice, "Fleeton's Point!", and I turned and looked downriver, where, sure enough, huge billows of smoke were rising from someplace just around the bend. My heart felt clammy as the big boat churned away from the wharf. For a while I couldn't move. I knew I wasn't supposed to leave home during emergencies—that was a standing rule; but this time the rule didn't seem right. I threw the ropes into our boat, jumped in, and started the motor. About that time my mother came running down to the dock yelling at me to get out of the boat, but I gunned the motor and headed toward the bend.

When I reached the bend I could see everything, and the sight of it made me feel dizzy and sick to my stomach. The old wooden house was a regular furnace, sending up thick clouds of crackling smoke, and setting the river ablaze so that the glare was almost blinding. As I got closer I could make out little black figures unwinding the fire hose, but they seemed to know that the fire had gotten too good a start. They finally got the hose on it, and I heard the crash of glass as the water forced its way through windowpanes. With hot, salty eyes I watched as the heavy roof beam collapsed, sending up showers of bright orange sparks.

I didn't dare go as close as the wharf, because I knew my father would really get mad if I went that close, so I just let the motor idle and sat out there and sobbed helplessly as I saw Leola's house burn down, the water reflecting every painful detail. I didn't know if Leola had gotten out or not, if she was dead or alive or badly burned or fine. I craned my neck every which way trying to find her outline somewhere up there, but it was hopeless. But I did see something strange that I knew hadn't been there before.

Finally the fire was under control and several men were dismissed, including my father. Their footsteps crunched down on the wharf and then they were in the boat with the motor roaring, pulling away from the dock. Suddenly my father recognized our boat, and they headed out toward me. They came alongside and my father climbed in with me—I was awful glad to see him. The men left and Dad told me quietly that they hadn't been able to save Leola; she had suffocated from the smoke. Then he put his jacket around me and he sat down in the stern and put one arm around me and let me cry on his shoulder as he steered us slowly toward home.

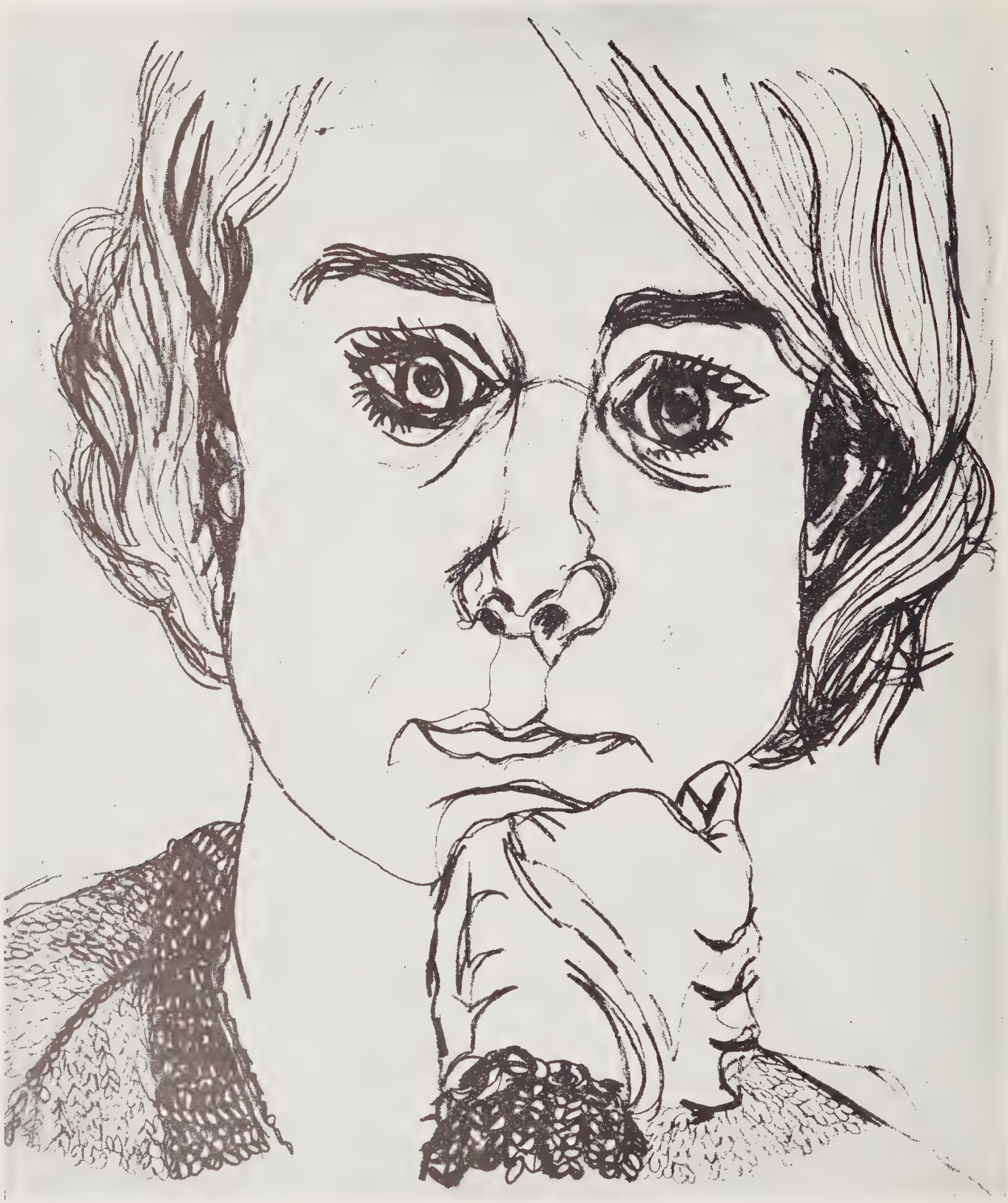
After a while I thought to ask Dad what was that charred black cross standing in the front yard for. He paused a second—then he told me. As I realized what had happened I felt stunned; then a cold, strange feeling crept slowly into my body, and soon I was trembling not from the cold but from hate.

Now And Then

Put it away
They say about love
that has not blown well.
Put it away.
And I may—I will—I've put it away
oh, it's skeletal dust just rises.

Now and Then
When no one hears
when no one speaks
Now and Then
Like a dubious child
on tiptoe again—I reach to
Put it away.

DENISE CROSS



Signet 16

Reba

a One Act Play

by Jane Mackey

The scene is a kitchen. A small wooden table is situated a shade left of stage center. It and its three matching chairs are painted a glossy white. The entire set shows the abuse of several years. At the deepest part of the stage in the center of the kitchen is a large enamel sink which shows its pipes below a pot-bellied basin. Above the sink is a small window surrounded by tired white curtains tied back in loose knots through which a cold drizzling rain can be seen. On either side of the sink is wooden counter space. Above the counters on both sides of the sink are rows of three cabinets painted a glossy white with glass knob handles. To the left of the sink and below the counter is a large white radiator which rattles and belches loudly. Next to the radiator is a small scuffed refrigerator which sits up on four small legs. A few feet further to the left is the door to a small pantry, and directly across stage, a four burner stove also painted white. Three feet to the right of it is the door to the apartment which leads outside.

From the right of the stage through the door leading to the outside of the apartment REBA enters. She is wearing a worn tweed coat a trifle long. She is fifty-ish. Her dark brown hair streaked with gray is swept back with combs of imitation tortoise shell decorated with rhinestones. Her pale complexion is blushed by the harsh weather outside. Her blue eyes betray extreme fatigue. Her tense lips are painted a pale color. Slung over her left arm is an oversized black purse with many compartments, each stuffed to capacity. Her shoes are sturdy black pumps. She is wearing a simple black cotton hat and black cotton gloves to protect her hands from the weather. In her arms is a large waterstained sack of groceries.

She proceeds to the kitchen table and sets the groceries and her purse down. She takes off her coat and throws it over the back of the center chair. She places her gloves over her purse. The dress she is wearing is a simple plaid of a green, blue and black design. She adjusts the black belt and glances at the clock on the wall near the pantry. It reads 11:40.

REBA: Are you up, Martin? Are you even awake yet?

She opens the first cabinet above and to the right of the sink and begins arranging some of the boxes on the bare shelves there to fill the gaps. Some of the boxes she moves to the edge of the shelf. She goes over to the bag of groceries and takes out a few cans. She returns to the open cabinet and places the cans on the edge of the empty second shelf.

REBA: You should have been up long ago, you know. I really expected you to have some lunch ready for me. It *is* about that time. Such a bad day, too. Just the kind of day when you'd like to have a hot bowl of soup and some tea waiting for you.

She moves over to the first cabinet above and to the left of the sink and begins putting groceries away there, moving each item to the edge of the shelf. Then, finished, she folds the watersoaked grocery bag and puts it in the first cabinet below and to the right of the sink.

REBA: Martin! Are you getting up? Martin?

She goes over to the table and picks up her coat, purse, and gloves and walks over to the pantry. The open door exposes a mop, broom, rusted pail, and a brightly colored can of cleanser sitting on the floor. There is a metal rod extending the width of the closet with a shelf directly above it. She hangs her coat on a metal coat hanger and tucks the gloves in the pocket. She places her purse on the shelf and sets her hat next to it. She closes the pantry door and goes over to the sink to wash her hands. She glances down into the sink.

REBA: Why, you haven't had breakfast yet, have you, Martin? Or did you already have it and go ahead and wash your dishes? You didn't wash my dishes, though. They're still here in the sink. I guess I shouldn't expect you to do mine, too. After all, you didn't dirty them. You're right, Martie, Mommie should do her own dishes. (She

pauses and shakes the water off her hands.) Are you ready for lunch yet?

She reaches in the first cabinet below and to the right of the sink and dries her hands on a small faded towel hanging on a hook on the door. She then removes a tattered apron from the hook next to it and ties it around her waist. Reaching into the first cabinet above and to the right of the sink she removes a can of soup leaving a gaping hole where it had stood. She closes the cabinet. Then bending down, she removes a battered saucepan from the second cabinet below and to the right of the sink.

REBA: I'm fixing vegetable soup today, Martin. That was always your father's favorite. Mine, too. I like it because it has something of everything in it. No two spoonfuls are the same. It's so hearty, too. (She stops and thinks.) You *do* like vegetable, don't you, Martie?

She walks over to the stove and turns on one of the front burners. She places the empty saucepan on it and goes over to the manual can opener bolted to the window sill over the sink, and she opens the can. She returns to the stove and dumps the contents into the smoking pan. A loud sizzle is heard. She returns to the sink and fills the can with water from the tap, and dumps it into the pan of soup. She places the can on the stove out of the way and picks up a spoon from a plate on the back of the stove where it had been resting.

REBA: Martin, you really should be getting up soon. We have a busy day ahead of us. I promised the man at the high school that you'd come and talk to him today. He said that you could finish your work with no trouble at all. He said that there are lots of boys your age in the adult night classes. You'd only have to go a few nights a week, and before you know it, you'd have your diploma! Just think of the fabulous job you could get then! (She continues to stir the soup.) Of course it wouldn't be a big paying job at first, but you wouldn't have to start at the bottom either. Our family name assures you of that. Your father was an important man and his name still has a lot of pull around here. Who knows, you might get his old job. I'd like to see you working for The Company. It was always good to us.

She tastes the soup. Then she shakes a bit of salt and pepper into it. She continues to stir.

REBA: I'm sure they'd be more than happy to have you on their staff. After all, a bright boy like you would be an asset to any company. (She pauses.) Martin? Are you listening to me? Are you getting ready for lunch?

She leaves the soup on the burner and goes over to the second cabinet above and to the left of the sink and takes out two plates and two soup bowls and places them on the table. She returns to the cabinet and takes out two spoons from the tray on the second shelf. She returns to the table and sets one cover at the left end of the table and the other at the center seat. She places the spoons beside the dishes and returns to stirring the soup.

REBA: Well, I suppose I'll go ahead and pour my soup. Do you mind if I go ahead and start, Martin? I'm so hungry. (She tastes the soup again.) Mmmmmmmmm. Good and hot.

She turns the burner down and lifts the pan with the edge of her apron. She carries it over to the table and pours about half of the contents of the pan in the bowl set at the center of the table. She returns the pan to the burner and goes over to the table and sits down at that seat.

REBA: Your father would be so happy to know that you're going back to school, Martie. He was so disappointed when you left. Of course, that was a special situation. He knew you didn't *want* to to leave your school. And that school that Sgt. Spencer sent you to! It certainly was lacking in its scope. I think you would have been better off at the public school. Schools of that sort aren't up to the calibre that bright boys like you need. They don't challenge you enough. I guess the dull boys must be considered, too, but I think that the sergeant should have noticed that you were so much ahead of them and left you where you were. We tried to persuade him, remember Martie? We talked until we were blue in the face, your father and I, but he didn't seem to care. He didn't even listen when we told him that we were community leaders.

REBA: Are you coming to lunch, Martin? Aren't you hungry at all? I would have thought that the smell of this good soup would have routed you out of bed. (She pauses and sips another spoonful of soup. Then brightly . . .) I'll bet I

know what you are doing. You're dressing for your appointment with the man at the high school. Sure you are! Mommie knows you well. You're putting on a fresh shirt that I've pressed for you and your dark slacks and coat, aren't you? I'll bet you're even wearing that pretty tie that Mommie gave you last Christmas. Oh, you'll look so nice that the man will *have* to accept you back into school. (Quickly . . .) Oh, not that he would not have anyway. He knows what a bright boy you are, and you have our name to back you. (She pauses and seems to dream . . .) Oh, Martin, you'll do so well in school! You'll probably do so well that you'll be offered a scholarship. Oh I'm sure you will! State! That's right! State will beg you to come there. Your father would be so happy to know that you're going to go to his old school. Everyone there will know you. You won't have a bit of trouble. You'll do so well and you'll have our name backing you the whole way.

She finishes the last bit of soup in the bowl. She looks to the left of the stage and listens for sounds. Hearing none, she returns her attention to the empty bowl. She scrapes the bottom. Then she gets up and stands behind her chair.

REBA: Martin? Are you going to eat this soup? If you're not hungry then I'll finish it. I can't imagine why you're not hungry. You hardly had any dinner last night and no breakfast this morning. That is unless you fixed it yourself. Sure you did! You didn't want to trouble Mommie so you fixed yourself a late brunch and cleaned up the dishes. You're such a bright boy.

She goes over to the stove and fills her bowl with the rest of the soup in the pan. She sets the bowl down on the stove and carries the pan over to the sink, and she runs water in it. Then she picks up the bowl from the stove and returns to her place at the table. She tastes the soup hesitantly and then begins to eat heartily.

REBA: Are you ready to go yet, Martin? Have you finished dressing? Do you need help with your tie? I used to always help your father with his. He'd be so happy to see you now; getting ready for your appointment with the man at the high school. You're going to go far, Martie, and you'll have our name behind you the whole way. (She looks up at the clock. It reads 12:30.) Oh! It's so late! I didn't realize that it was getting to be this time. (She is quickly eating her soup.) Are you ready to go? (She glances out the window at the rain which is beating against the panes. A whistling wind can be faintly heard.) I wouldn't blame you for not wanting to go out today. It's raining and so cold outside. I can't remember when the weather was this bad. Perhaps it was like this when I went to pick you up at that special school, but I was so glad to be bringing you home that I hardly noticed the weather. The house was so empty with your father gone that I could hardly stand it. And I missed you so much, Martie.

She takes her dishes over to the sink and runs water in them. Then she returns to the table and picks up the unused plate and bowl and returns them to the second cabinet above and to the left of the sink.

REBA: I haven't even got time for tea today. I've really dawdled around so much. Are you going to the school? I really couldn't blame you if you didn't want to. It's such a nasty day. I'd rather you waited until a nicer day to go and see the man. You don't do well on rainy days and I'd hate for the man at the school to think you're not the bright boy I told him you were. There's no reason why he shouldn't *know* you're smart. You have our name to back you up.

She goes over to the pantry and takes out her coat and puts it on. Then she puts on her hat and gloves and buttons up her coat. She reaches for her purse and checks its contents. She closes the door.

REBA: Would you rather I do that then, Martie? I can stop by the school and tell the man that you have a cold and couldn't come today. I'm sure he'll believe me. On a nasty day like this anyone could have a cold. I'll do it then. I'll stop by the school and tell the man that you're sick and you'll come by next week. Is that all right, Martie? Mommie knows you well and she wouldn't want you out on a day like this.

She walks over to the right of the stage to the door leading to the outside of the apartment.

REBA: I'll see you for supper, then, Martie. Cover up and stay warm. Mommie doesn't want your cold to get worse.

(EXIT)

Ruins

Thoughts,
Brightly flaring,
Pace their dark ages.
Words twist
Their leaf-like
Flickering edges.
Branch-bound,
Still captive,
Fantasy sketches
Wistful
Transparent hypotheses—
Whimsical
Blueprints
Of smoky wreaths.
How clumsy!
These barren words—
Partly spoken:
Shapeless,
Forsaken wreckage
Of stricken daydreams in air.

EDMUND T. WEIANT

In Memoriam

(To Tony Traverso)

High Noon!
Above the island's
Only beer saloon and soda parlor,
The siren rises from her roof,
Announcing—
    (to all the barefoot kids in town)
The NEWS
    That Tony's Star,
    An ice-cream-scoop,
    Will prove to Earth again
    That Love Is Round!
The siren, howling from the roof,
Announces
    (to older rolling stones in town)
The NEWS
    That Tony's Bar
    Is passing through
    Our looped meridian.
    Another Round!

EDMUND T. WEIANT

Edmund T. Weiant

Skywatch

24/XI/68

A
F A L L
Of multiple
Eclipsing jewels
In pulsing clusters!
Extragalactic
Particles.
The
Plaster
Dust rains down
From out
The
h e a v e n s .
A N D R O M E D A
Has dropped
Her
Galaxy!
A gift of radiance,
A sign,
Now,
She, herself,
F a l l s t h r o u g h
The ceiling!
A
S U P E R N O V A
T E A R I N G O U T
T H E S K Y .
A
S U N
That Tycho
Never lived to see.

SIN LOS ANIMALES

Esthela Rodriguez, Equadorian, age 8.
One of large family
Father earns less than $1.50 a day
Live in small bamboo house over muddy water.
No milk. Always hungry.
Struggle for Esthela in school
Dreams of becoming a nurse to help.

And she asks, "Help."

I heard on the radio
An actor gave a life's rations to a dog.
An important dog, that turned a flock of
Trampling sheep—those Gentle ones?
Saved the actor's life,
And the actor was grateful to the animal.
Dauntless Dog.

Maybe he didn't know that Esthela would eat dog,
dauntless or no.

I knew a preacher once, Baptist he was,
Preaching, he got 600 a month—he wanted more,
Car, swimming pool,
After all, how would it look . . .
Given by the rich of the Congregation—those Capable ones?
He had a wife, four children, two dogs, a canary.
Cheerful Companions.

He had dedicated his life to God,
not to Esthela.

There is the story of the wealthy widow
Died, she did
And left a sizable legacy
To nine cats—those Independent ones?
They had been strays, unwanted,
Until she loved them in her loneliness.
Whimpering Waifs.

If I knew Spanish, or Equadorian,
I would write a letter:
"Dear Esthela, you are not an animal,
You are a people—no one will
Help you."

DENISE CROSS

Barcy

Carolyn Satterfield

I've been sitting in this bar for two hours now watching the people come and go, come and go. Tonight I'm drinking ginger ale, but usually I drink scotch. Ginger ale was made for people like me, made for those who want to spend their bar hours in deep observation without the danger of anyone observing those of us who are watching, watching always those who aren't drinking ginger ale.

I've been sitting in this bar on nights identical to this night for two months now. I cannot count the hours. I begin to think this bar contains the world. I am not wrong in some respects. This world, in the days, in the hours I have spent here has been broken into many fragments; pieces made up mainly of people I know and know well, those whom I have met, and those I will never know.

Scotch and soda is a drink reserved for the observation of the latter category; ginger ale for the former. I've placed my faith in scotch and soda. An alcoholic is committed, at least to something.

If he weren't so busy I'd call Barcy over. He is my obsession. I remember the first night I met him. I had just arrived in New York state, and had entered the bar hesitantly, not quite sure of what I was supposed to do. I ordered a whiskey sour.

"You gonna be here for the summer?" Barcy's voice was a little raspy, but not unpleasantly so.

"Yes."

"Well, Baby, let me tell you one thing. Whiskey sours just aren't gonna do."

"Really?" I responded. I had always liked them.

"Hell no. Keep drinking those things and by the end of the summer your stomach will be completely torn up. Fruit drinks just aren't for you at this stage of the game. I'm gonna let you try a gin and tonic. If you don't like it, don't drink it, but for the Lord's sake you gotta try."

Looking back on that night I have to laugh a little. What possible difference could my stomach have made to Barcy.

But I liked him; at first only because of the typical reason that anybody likes anybody. He was good to me. I would talk to him for hours when he wasn't busy. He was a good listener, nodding his head at the right time, frowning to show disapproval. He never volunteered an opinion unless it was asked for, never spoke of himself unless he was questioned directly. Even then his answers were always spoken with definite reserve.

I became aware of Barcy as a person only after I had become acutely sensitive to the fact that he didn't belong behind a bar.

"When I was at Williams, I knew a guy who . . ."

These words were heard in the same instant that I reached for my cigarettes and knocked my drink over. The sentence was lost in the midst of cleaning up the mess I had created, but I knew I had to know more about Barcy.

From observation I learned that Barcy was living a frivolous existence. Money was easy for him to make. Not that his meager paycheck was ample to take him places only money could take him, but a good bartender could clear $200 or more a week on tips. He was good at his work. He was fast behind the bar, and he had learned to listen rather than talk. He also possessed Mary Kay. He was sure now. Sure today as he had been sure every summer for the past four years. Every year he was sure of someone different.

"Barcy," I said one afternoon, "you should marry Mary Kay."

"Why, Baby?" He was washing out shot glasses.

"You're twenty-seven. Haven't you ever thought of settling down?"

"No way," was his only reply. Barcy was uncommitted. He was a ginger ale man.

He spent every afternoon at the Saratoga tracks. Betting $200 on a horse meant nothing to him. He had been lucky so far. Every summer he had come out ahead. Recently things have been a little different. Barcy's found his scotch and soda. Lately he's been feeding the state of New York, rather than the other way around. I've been watching him sweat. He's seeming a little too frantic. I think he's scared. Maybe he's realizing for the first time that he should have been drinking scotch and soda all along. Maybe he worries that it's too late for him to change.

Only yesterday I overheard Barcy telling a customer, in a manner that could not conceal all doubts, "Seventy-six . . . That combination's gonna come in for us today."

I'd like to see you lose, Barcy, I remember thinking to myself; and now, sitting here again, finishing my fourth ginger ale, I can no longer be sure.

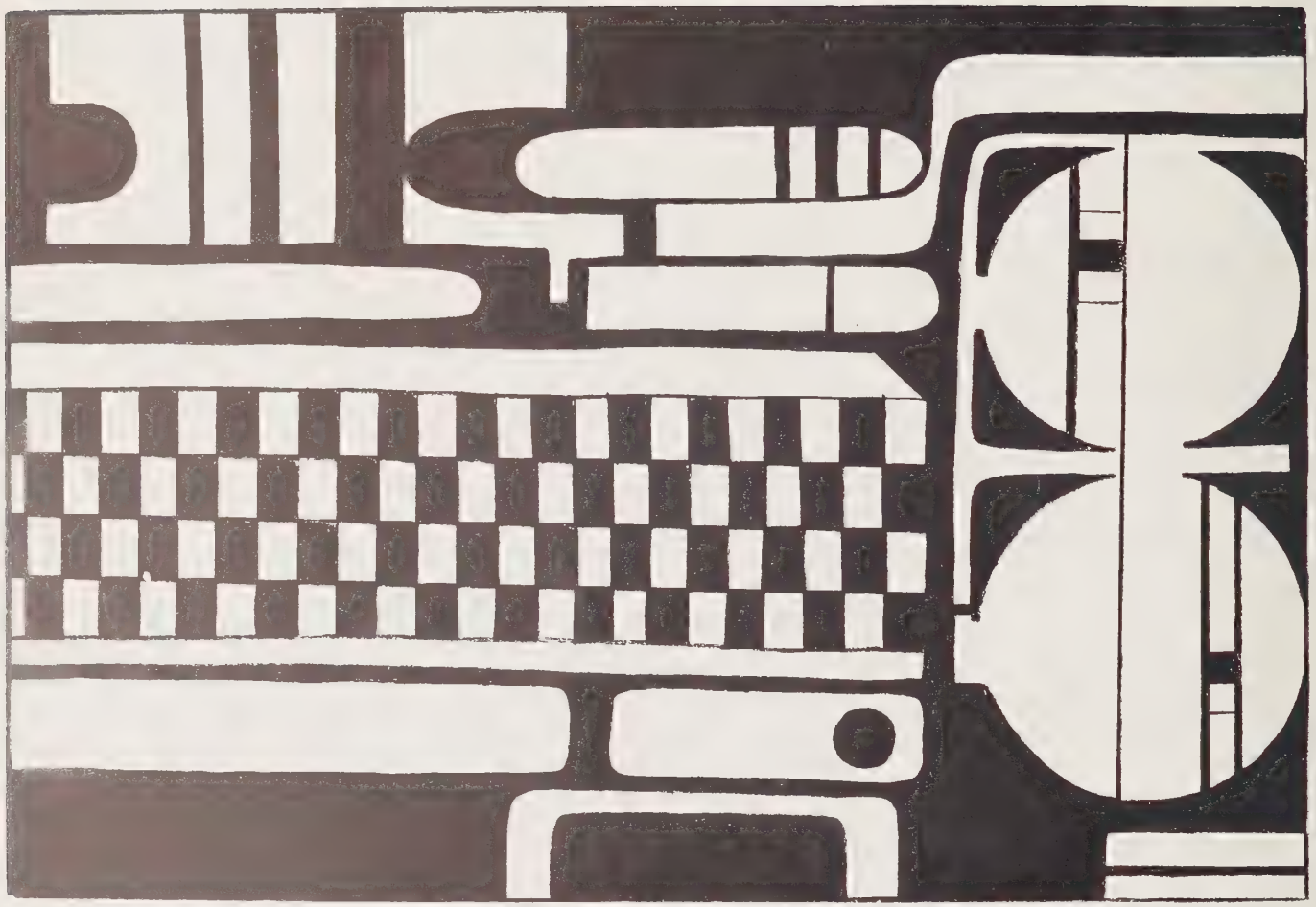
Route One

Snow fences, rough and weathered boards which run
at the wind's feet, line the bony hills.
February found them holding back the spills
of snow, holding Winter in. (or out)
Today the idle, bending boards staked to
crew-cut grasses lean beneath the sun,
shadow casters, woolen weather through.

Coasting birds, their shadows dropped below
them over naked fields, these silent hawks
cast their wing spans on the ragged stalks
and stubble pushed aside by growing sprouts.
The drifting birds are silent in their flight
from corn snow. Into Spring they come and go,
hunters sailing in and out of sight.

The vendor roasting chestnuts in the street
will soon fill palms instead of mittened hands.
Winter's in the gutter where he stands,
but melting now and soon to leave no doubt
that even where concrete engulfs the lawn,
in places hawks and pigeons never meet,
Spring is rising from it with a yawn.

LESLIE ANNE DAVIS



Signet 24

Capsule For Inner Space

While we recline on couches,
our systems analyst
guides the ship.
Space pretends to be black and void
but exploration, thanks to Freud,
reveals that the feigned Sea of Tranquillity
has undulating Waves of Hostility
threatening to drown us.

MARY GUNTER

Almost Sonnet

Did you ever get tired of smilin'?
Said the owl to the cheshire cat.
Did you ever tire of runnin'?
Asked turtle of his rival rabbit.

Do you sometimes weary of jumpin'?
Asked teddy bear of kangaroo.
Why don't you give up stickin'?
Posed dry snow to airplane glue.

Have you considered yet not believin'?
Said scarecrow to the man of religion.
Did you ever think of not?
Pleaded statue to persistent pigeon.

Have you ever been tired of tryin'?
I tempted me.

sfr

Icarus

Float high
and dip your hair
into the blue . . .
Crouch low
upon the wide
drifting—rafts.
The horizon
draws me
nearer to its
multicolored breast—
Swallowing
my sinking
Icarus . . .
Leaving it
to melt
in the warm sun . . .
Dissolve
Into the radiant sea.

CHARLEY CARLOCK

words . . .
needless after so long a time together,
after the stream of nights and mornings,
(predictable in beginnings and endings)
anticipated caresses
(I could draw you a diagram.)
we're so much alike, we agree
run in the same groove, so to speak.
comforting, I guess.
(security is like death, someone told me.)

URSULA ALEXANDER

Da Sein Man Preferred

Lumps of human flesh
Curl about a thought . . . by definition inhuman.
Easily twined, twisted
Into tangible space
They tumble, rumble into
A particular place.
Perfected in a novel way
They slither and slime
Within this delineating rhyme.
Fleshy essences are devoutly,
Deviantly betrayed,
Distorted from the real lumps
They could so easily have stayed.

SALLY STITES

Rebel Yells

Mary Ann Hester

"To hell with your fine Southern traditions!" So I screamed on my fifteenth birthday and so will I repeat on my seventy-fifth. I mean, me living in the 1960 South must be the work of the fickle finger of fate. To tell the truth (which I do only when convenient, due to my lousy home environment) I have no desire to see the South or the 60's again. As you might have guessed I'm just one of those "rebellious and ungrateful kids" that enjoy kicking The Establishment, our Southern branch being especially vulnerable.

My illustrious, custom-conscious parental figures named me "Rebel," which is the only bit of foresight they have ever shown. It's an asinine name for a girl but at least I wasn't stuck with "Scarlett" or "Mary Rosemary" like my two half-witted sisters. Come to think of it, they *deserve* names like that—anybody that would knit coverlets for The Daughters of the Confederacy has to be a profound retard. The only one I feel any sympathy for in my family is my younger brother, "Quentin Beauregard Lee." That's some name for a kid, especially if he's the only boy in the family. I mean that kid is completely devoid of any of the usual childish illusions. When he was ten he told Mom that Peter Pan looked like a queer and that Mary Martin was a fool for ever doing such a cruddy movie. The same afternoon he pee'd on our kitten Blackjack. He had told Mom that if "that was the only way he could teach that damn cat some manners, then he'd do it." Nobody believed him (he'd always been a big talker) but that cat has never come within ten yards of him since. The rest of my family are what the newspapers call "progressive and gracious Southerners." Like hell they are! Moms is still fighting the Civil War and Daddy thinks all Yankees have Jungle Rot. If our house had been around when *Gone With The Wind* was filmed it would have had to be in it. The facade is complete with white columns, black servants, and tenement houses that the Slattery's would turn up their noses at. I mean, it's really wild to see all the different incomes, attitudes, and architecture that exists within ten miles of our house. But then I guess you'd be confused too, living in the Poverty Area, the Golden Strip, and the Bible Belt all at the same time.

But before you forget it, let's go back to my worldly statement of independence. Like I said I declared war on all the old Southern traditions at the age of fifteen, but it wasn't a sudden decision. I mean a broad statement like that needs preparation and I gave The Family two steady years of it. When I was thirteen I had a birthday party that will go down in history around here. It coincided with Mother's UDC meeting, and at a highly tense moment I galloped through the living room yelling "Sherman, Sherman, you come back heah . . ." (Sherman was my basset hound birthday present.) This may seem like a mere annoying prank to you but around her it was *scandalous*. To finish the party in grand style my friends and I refought the Civil War right under the noses of the "Daughters," which is not too unusual except that under my brilliant leadership the North won again. I mean *twice* is just too much for the progeny of the Confederacy.

That fall, the parents decided to send me to a small private Christian school that was really superior in turning out small Christians. I mean William Faulkner would have just *drooled* at all the material he could have found there. I stayed there for almost three years until my Huck Finn Complex overruled my better judgment and I wrote a religion paper on "Why I Wouldn't Mind Going to Hell."

At fourteen it was total war on everybody in my antique-filled town. My first serious campaign was made by sending a donation to the NAACP, in Daddy's name of course. He even got a little card that made him an official member. My next main project was the conversion of my little "Southern gentleman" brother into a Normal, Happy American Boy. He already had the ten-

dencies (I told you about Peter Pan) so all I had to do was work on him a little. I mean, in a few weeks he didn't even want to go to the Citadel anymore. Overjoyed with my efforts, my friends and I led a sit-in for "free love" on our legendary courthouse steps and got hauled off to our historic jail for a couple of hours. I thought of it as one of Life's Little Invaluable Experiences but the Family thought otherwise and they voted four to two to send me off to another boarding school.

Somehow I stayed there till graduation on the promise that I could go to the "college of my choice." They really weren't too surprised when I decided on the University of Maine, which was as far North as I could imagine. Mother only made three requests of me as she sent me off to the Opposition; she begged me to keep my "lovely Southern accent," to "remember my upbringing" (how could I forget it?), and have another Southerner for a roommate. Well the first two requests have been instilled in me for eighteen years so I doubt that four years of college will do them much harm. As for my roommate, she is the nicest Southern girl you could ask for . . . beautiful, considerate, smart, and to please Mother she comes from one of the nicest colored families in Virginia . . .

A Set of Three

I look into the past to see
A little girl who used to be me;
Pink ribbon in black curls,
A single strand of beaded pearls,
And worn for smiling grown-up faces—
Small white shoes with new-washed laces;
A doll with dingy lipstick traces
And lots of ugly faded places.

Some years later I see the same
Little girl, but with a different name:
White shoes and frilly dresses,
Pink ribbon through black tresses.
And such has been the years' design,
For this little girl is actually mine.

Years came so fast my vision blurs—
And brought another who is hers—
But I was weary when last I saw
My grandchild with my son-in-law.
Frills and ribbons just the same,
But a new doll, and a new name.

A kiss for me, and shortly none:
A set of three that time has won.

KATHY MITCHELL

Two Poems
by
Paul Baker Newman

The Hamster

A hamster's life begun,
two turns of earth and sun
have ended. Child, when you asked
that answer in your mind, the root
turned endless like a shoot
of beach-grass sprouting un-
expected blades
and took on shades
as cold as nails. Tasked,
I say you should have won-
dered when you undertook
that life that no one
wanted and that time forsook.

Pastoral

It was nice to lie there listening
to the music and remember
the hailstones big as golfballs thudding
on the iron corrugated roof,
Beethoven's sixth, the thunder,
and the wild fresh air trying
to rip itself to pieces.
The line squall was rolling a scud of low black cloud
a solid sheet of water, whirlpools in it,
and the rain a white mist
filling the air with hissing
spraying the ground like fire hoses.
The hailstones turned to popcorn
and we dashed out and danced,
the hailstones popping on the grass
and the rain washed dripping from our faces.
The inner joy of it was seeming,
pines as cool as Maine, and ocean
flowing through their needles.

The If In Biff's

by Ann Scott Gray

I touched Sarah's arm and turned her into the bar. Its flashing neon sign cut into the fog. BIFF'S BAR it had been until time had killed the B and F and S—now IF stared me in the eye. God, was it smoky inside—the kind of smoke that slaps you in the face and when you turn around it slaps again. It was a rectangular room, I thought, until we sat down in the corner booth and I saw the alcove to the left of the bar hidden from everyone else's view. I sat back, pulled one knee up to my chest, which always irritated Sarah, and looked around.

Dark, musty linoleum covered the floor. The stains and heel marks which showed the past popularity of the establishment now glared at the peeling paint of the ceiling. The tables once wounded by names written within lopsided hearts were now only made slightly uncomfortable by the pressure of elbows. Red plastic upholstery covered the seats of the booths and the seven stools around the squatty bar.

I ordered two drinks. The bartender looked upset. Funny how a person whose job depends on people considers them intruders. The other customers glanced in our direction, shifted elbows, and returned to their glasses. Only the man sitting in the hidden corner was undisturbed by our entry.

Sarah broke the silence. Laughing, she said, "Oh, God, Mark, poor Jennifer. Drunk because her lover flew to the arms of a policewoman. It's hysterical. The law robs!"

"That man, the one in the corner, has a tie on like mine."

"She deserves it anyway. She really is a bitch."

And on, and on, and on. All my life I wanted what now I had—Sarah, the law firm, money. Why couldn't I relate? It must be the season, November always turns its back on you.

"Mark, you haven't heard a word I've said."

"I was looking at that man's tie."

"What man? What are you talking about?"

I looked at him now. He acted old, odd how jet black his hair was. His attaché case rested against his chair. He leaned away from it somehow, bent his head over his drink, and quietly clutched the

edges of the table. I wondered why he had no watch on.

"Oh, I see. That one in the corner. He's been looking up my dress since we got here."

There she goes again. Everything she encounters she connects to somehow. The man hasn't taken his eyes off his glass.

"That's the one with the tie like mine."

"Oh, Mark, I do pity him. It's sad when lives crumble with no hope of rebuilding. It's just that he's one of many. Oh, let's go, my eyes are stinging. I'll never know why you picked this bar out of all the nice ones."

I started to leave, but I saw the man stir.

"Let me finish my drink, Sarah."

The man slowly drained his glass, leaned over and reluctantly picked up his brief case. He stood up, took a watch out of his side pocket and put it on his wrist. Straightening his tie and his face, he lifted his head and walked out the bar with IF above the door.

"Okay, I'm ready. I didn't know he had a watch."

"What are you talking about? Mark, sometimes you say such mediocre things."

I tried to get out of going up to Sarah's apartment. I didn't want to happen what I was sure would. But I sat down on the couch, gathered both knees close to me and stared at the fire.

"Mark, why do you insist on sitting like that? It looks perverted."

"Shut up, Sarah."

"What is wrong with you? You've been a complete son of a bitch for a week and oblivious to anyone else's feeling."

"Sarah, I just have to be let alone for awhile. Let's not go out this next week. Give me a chance to think a little."

"What are you saying? Mark, if I lost you I . . ."

"That's it, Sarah, get dramatic. You'd probably jump down ten floors, land on your feet, and walk off."

God, I did want it to happen. I was enjoying it. She was crying uncontrollably and I didn't feel a thing. What a bastard.

"Give me a chance to loosen up, to work this out alone. I'll call you next week."

As I shut the door to the apartment I could still hear her damn sobbing. I knew I'd never go back, never call her, never see her again unless she came to me. I walked outside and felt the cold air. It was fresh and clean. I thought about the man in the bar all the way home. I began to laugh when I remembered him pulling out his watch and putting on his mask. By the time I got to my apartment I was howling.

I sat down and rested my chin on my knees, holding them tightly with both arms. That queer had on a tie like mine, damn him. Tie, watch—and my attaché case was over on the desk which had been in the family for years. An apartment furnished by Mother, Grandmother, Great Grandfather, Aunt Jean, and God knows who else. I looked into the mirror. There I was, balled up like some mental case. I rose, walked to the bar and mixed a drink. The ice felt good on my hand. I didn't use the silver tongs. The whiskey hit my stomach warm. I walked over to the bookcase and lifted out the book of poems Sarah had given me, with all her love, for some holiday. Looking through the index I found "IF." I focused on three particular lines.

"If you can trust yourself when all men doubt
    you . . .
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And—which is more you'll be a Man, my son."

Man, son, son of a bitch.

O hell, Sarah was probably still crying. If I was ever lost in the desert I hoped she'd be along. Her tears could furnish water for ten days. I did love her—once more than I loved myself. Could all that have changed? It was my fault, why make her suffer? Suddenly I collapsed laughing—that man had a watch. He'd probably left The Business Club for a few brief moments alone in the big IF Bar. That's what he was thinking about, if, if, if—but it was too much for him. Then my laughter changed to tears. I was crying, my knees drawn to my chest. Finally I steadied.

"Goddammit."

I got up, lifted the receiver, and dialed Sarah's number.

It must be the season, November always turns its back on you. And, as they always say, "If is a mighty big word."

The Bug

On sills of grey slate
lie crystal, lifeless veins. Why
die in public view?

CONNIE FRASER

NOTES

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